

Frequently Asked Questions
Swine Influenza
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Q. Is the vaccine Soldiers received in 1976 still good?

A. The Swine Influenza seen in this outbreak has not been previously detected in pigs or humans. The 1976 vaccine was made against a different strain of influenza and would not protect against this one.

Q. What plans do hospitals have in case of a breakout?

A. Military and civilian hospitals have emergency response plans for mass casualty situations and epidemics. The military health system developed these plans to deal with emerging diseases, such as pandemic influenza, and are coordinated with the civilian system to ensure close cooperation with the civil authorities.

Q. Who is most vulnerable to infection or death?

A. Influenza typically is most dangerous for the very old or very young. According to the World Health Organization Web Site, the majority of these cases have occurred in otherwise healthy young adults. As more is learned about this particular outbreak, there will be more information on who is most vulnerable to this infection.

Q. Have any Soldiers or other Army patients been infected?

A. We are aggressively monitoring any soldiers hospitalized for influenza-like illnesses. To date, there have been no confirmed cases of Swine Influenza in any soldiers or in any patients in Army hospitals.

Q. What is the Army doing as far as education and prevention?

A. The Army is working closely with the rest of the Department of Defense and with the Department of Health and Human Services to provide a coordinated response to this outbreak.

Q. Will the flu shot provided in Fall 2008 protect people from strain of influenza?

A. This Swine Influenza strain is different than the human strains that were used in creating the vaccine in 2008. Therefore, we would not expect any protection from the vaccine for this particular strain. The vaccine will protect against the commonly occurring strains of human influenza.

Q. Why do 20 infections constitute an emergency or an epidemic?

A. This is from the HHS website:

The Department of Health and Human Services issued a nationwide public health emergency declaration in response to recent human infections with a newly discovered swine influenza A (swine flu) virus. The formal declaration of a Public Health Emergency (PHE) is a tool that facilitates HHS' preparation and mobilization for disasters and emergencies. For example, PHEs were recently declared for flooding in North Dakota, the Inauguration, and several 2008 hurricanes.

Today's declaration, made under section 319 of the Public Health Service Act, will help HHS prepare for prevention and mitigation activities by enabling Food and Drug Administration (FDA) emergency use authorizations of drugs, devices, or medical tests under certain circumstances.

Specifically, today's PHE will enable the FDA to review and issue emergency use authorizations (EUAs) for the use of certain laboratory tests to help detect the newly discovered strain of influenza and for the emergency use of certain antivirals.

"HHS is taking these steps today to be proactive in responding to this new influenza virus by offering national tools in support of community-led preparedness and response efforts," Acting HHS Secretary Charles Johnson said. "The declaration allows us the flexibility, while we learn more about the virus and its impact in the United States, to take additional steps to fully mobilize our prevention, treatment and mitigation capabilities should those actions become necessary."

In addition to the declaration, HHS leaders are working together across operating divisions to coordinate response to the swine flu outbreak. For example, the FDA, the National Institutes of Health, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention are working together to develop a vaccine precursor that could be used to develop a vaccine for this swine flu virus.

Q. Are deployed Servicemembers in danger of infection; what preventive measures are in place across the Army?

A. Based on the most recent information, deployed service members are at no increased risk of infection. The Army is encouraging everyone to follow the recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) on what can be done to stay healthy. These recommendations are:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hands cleaners are also effective.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread that way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.

Influenza is thought to spread mainly person-to-person through coughing or sneezing of infected people.

If you get sick, CDC recommends that you stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.

Q. Is this an epidemic or pandemic and what is the difference?

A. An outbreak is when there is an increase in the number of cases of a disease above the baseline levels. When there are a large number of cases that constitutes an epidemic. When there are multiple sites around the world of large numbers of cases that is a pandemic. The CDC is currently calling this an epidemic, but both military and civilian experts around the world are monitoring this closely.